

## when i'm ready i will fly us out of here by meliebee

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** EL LOVES HER FRIENDS SO MUCH IMMA CRY, F/M, I need some Validation, Joyce and Nancy are the girls' role models okay sorry I doN'T MAKE THE RULES, Post-Season/Series 02, dustin says like one (1) bad word sorry kids, el and max are best friends and this is how it happens!!!, girls supporting girls, its dustin what can I say, like thats literally the point of this story, look this is rlly rlly rlly bad and I did it in like two hours but blease, no girl hate here!!!, so much female positivity u could swim in it, thats my kink lads, this is how season three is going to happen sorry I don't make the rules

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Eleven & Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Everyone & Everyone, Will Byers & Eleven & Dustin Henderson & Lucas Sinclair & Mike Wheeler

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**Summary:**

“And,” says Joyce, blowing over her coffee and shivering a bit. There’s still a hole in the Byers’ house, and it’s cold enough that her coffee is steaming. “Sometimes there are things that you might want to talk about with another girl. There’s nothing wrong with guy friends, honey, but sometimes it’s important to have girlfriends too.” She reaches out to grip El’s fingers, and El hums thoughtfully into her tea.

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### Author's Note:

title is from "this is home" by cavetown which somehow conveys like fifty bajillion emotions

El thinks Max is the coolest person she knows, and she loves her, and she thinks Max is her own personal sunshine. It doesn't start like that, though.

It starts with: "Hey, um, I'm Max," and shoulder shoving. It starts with: Mike smiling at the pretty girl wearing jeans and spinning on a skateboard. It starts, really, with being locked into a cabin for a year and slowly losing her mind as loneliness sunk deep and unfamiliar into her bones.

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El thinks that it's strange, that she hated that cabin so much. A year before everything, that cabin would have been heaven on earth. It's because of Mike, she knows, Mike and Dustin and Lucas and *friends*, and bikes and forests and Benny's burgers and seeing the world for such a painfully short time before she lost it all in an instant. The world outside the windows was close enough that she could smell it, but Hopper said don't be stupid and El wasn't. She *wasn't*, she *isn't*.

Sometimes when she was having a bad day, Hopper would sit beside her on the couch and toss a blanket over her curled-up form and tell her about all the things she'd do when she'd be safe enough to go outside. Go to a waffle café. Snowball. Sledding with her friends. Snowmen. Shopping. She could do anything she wanted, be anything she wanted, Hopper said. He'd promise her things until the ache in her bones faded and his voice would lull her to a dreamless sleep, and the last thing she'd feel was his hand in hers, and comfort was new, for El.

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Joyce likes to curl her hands around her mug of coffee like she's keeping the cold away. Joyce calls them girls' nights. She doesn't say that she's hoping to invite Max one day, but El knows anyway. Joyce

talks about lots of things with El. She does most of the talking, but that's okay. El knows that if she wanted to talk more, Joyce would listen. Joyce, she thinks, would always listen. They talk about school, sometimes, because Hopper has been trying to get her up to speed before next year but it's tricky. They talk about Mike, and the others, and Joyce's eyes are fond but she tells El things she hadn't known before, like *you can say no* and *take things slow* and *it's important to love yourself*.

"And," says Joyce, blowing over her coffee and shivering a bit. There's still a hole in the Byers' house, and it's cold enough that her coffee is steaming. "Sometimes there are things that you might want to talk about with another girl. There's nothing wrong with guy friends, honey, but sometimes it's important to have girlfriends too." She reaches out to grip El's fingers, and El hums into her tea.

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"El?" Dustin sounds weird, and she looks up. He's lying on her bed, upside down. His head dangles over the edge of the mattress, and she giggles. His curls are too long. They almost brush the top of the floor.

"Dustin," she prompts, when he's going cross-eyed looking her and still hasn't anything more. She shifts on the floor, cocooned in two blankets with a book on her lap.

"El," he continues, and his voice is softer than usual and more serious than it has been all afternoon. El sits up straighter and lowers her book. "How come you don't like Max?"

El rolls her eyes, huffing and relaxing again. "I don't not like her," she grumbles, and Dustin snorts at her, spinning around and propping himself up on his elbows.

"Bullshit. Why don't you like her?"

El shrugs uncomfortably, looking back down at her book and hoping he'll get the message, but he only raises an eyebrow, unimpressed.

"El." His voice is serious again, but El furrows her brow and continues reading. "I'm only saying something, because, well. It doesn't make sense to me, you know? I think you could really like

her if you wanted to.” El lifts her head to glare at him, and he raises both eyebrows. “And, y’know... Max thinks you’re cool. She wants to be your friend, El. Really.” He sounds too earnest for El to ignore him, so she settles for shrugging again and picking up a pillow to shove his face with.

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They’re sitting in a diner. Mike sits to her side, Will next to him. Across from them sit Dustin, Lucas, and Max. Max is hanging half off the bench, as Lucas and Dustin are fighting, with Mike throwing in a comment every now and then and Will rolling his eyes fondly. They’re too loud, but they always are, and El loves them for it. The waitress is sending them looks, and El pushes a fry around on her plate distractedly.

She looks up absently when a group of men jostle into the diner, pushing and shoving and laughing. They’re older than the party, late teens to twenties probably, and they make their way noisily to the booth behind the one where El and the others sit. As they pass by, El sees one of the men stoop down with a hand to slap Max’s rear.

Max’s grabbed the man before El can even process what just happened, gripping the man’s wrist in her small hands. “Don’t *touch* me, you sexist piece of shit,” Max spits, twisting the man’s wrist as he cusses, surprised. El’s eyes are wide, and the others are falling silent, realising something must have happened.

He yanks his wrist away, holding it close to his chest, and glares furiously. “Bitch,” he snarls, but Max narrows her eyes threateningly and he hastily heads over to where the rest of his friends are already seated in the booth.

Max’s angry eyes follow him until he’s sat down, and then she turns back to the table. “What?” She sounds pissed off and defensive, and Lucas reaches over to hold her hand, but she takes it back from him. “He doesn’t just get to touch me.”

“Course not, Max,” Lucas says, but his tone is kind of confused, like he doesn’t realise why Max is so annoyed. He didn’t see what happened, El thinks to herself, but suddenly something compels her to speak up.

"No." All eyes swivel to hers, and she sees that Max's eyes are beginning to look kind of shiny, angry and betrayed, so El clarifies. "He doesn't. No one does."

Max's eyes widen in surprise, and her lips twitch into something like a smile, nodding her head jerkily. Lucas and Dustin still look a bit bewildered, but they both smile encouragingly and ask Max if she's okay, and Will sends El a smile and Mike kisses her cheek, his eyes concerned. She'll tell him what happened later. For now, she pops a fry into her mouth and notices every time Max glances her way.

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The thing is, Joyce wasn't *wrong*. El doesn't really want to talk about the first time she gets her period with Mike or Will, even though Joyce tells her that half the population has to deal with it and she shouldn't be ashamed. Mike is very understanding, and cuddles up with her to watch soap operas, but El can't deny that she's kind of uncomfortable. It's nothing he's doing, though, it's just that... she would like to have someone her age who's going through the same thing. Who understands, fully and completely.

And none of the boys are any help when it comes to clothes, because they all say she looks great in everything, which is very sweet and El loves them for it, but. School is tricky, and she wants to look *right*. Hopper says to ignore people who are too small for kindness, but El doesn't want to do something wrong right at the start, and it's *hard* when it seems like no matter what girls do, someone will always have something to say. El studies her reflection in the changing room mirror and frowns at herself.

And she and Will paint each other's nails, and she bakes with Lucas, and Mike makes her flower crowns, and Dustin watches telenovelas with her for hours on end, but El just feels kind of hollow. Like she's missing something. Like she's missing Max. (It's in moments where El thinks of something funny and she finds Max's eyes across the room but they're both too wary for anything to happen. It's in moments when Max looks kind of betrayed, huddled in on herself, like the fact that El doesn't like her is physically hurting her. It's in moments when the boys' laughter falters when they remember that the two girls they care about so deeply don't care for each other. It's in moments where it hurts and it's lonely and El doesn't understand *why*

and it makes her so angry.)

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Things change gradually, with moments of laughter dripping away like frost on sun-kissed grass and moments of uncomfortable silence, and moments of understanding passing over a diner table, and then things change very quickly very fast.

“Max,” says El, because she thinks it should be her. (She’s trying not to think too much, though.) This is the tricky party, what comes next: “Do you want to draw with me?” She’s careful not to stutter over the words.

Max stares at her. “Draw,” she repeats disbelievingly, like a statement.

El twists her fingers together and resists the urge to scowl. It doesn’t matter, she tells herself, but it *does*. This *matters*.

“Will showed me,” El says haltingly, when Max is still staring and the silence is growing more and more oppressive.

“I know what drawing is.”

El’s fingers twitch, and she wishes Mike was there to relive some of the tension hanging in the air, but she knows she has to be the one to do this. She was the one who pushed Max away before even knowing her, that was all El. This is up to her.

The silence grows to be too much and El’s lips droop. “Sorry,” she mumbles, and turns away, but Max jerks forward, frantic but like she doesn’t want to look like she cares.

“Wait.”

El turns, uncertain, and Max licks her lips. “Draw with you,” she repeats, and her gaze is burning. “Why?”

El shrugs, letting her fingers fall into the soft, worn pockets of her overalls. “You don’t like the game,” she tries, “Me neither.” Max leans back again and El is surprised by her desperation, her commitment to fixing this. It seems dumb, for them both to be sitting

out on D&D but not sitting out together. “And.” She shrugs again, trying to find the words but coming up empty. “Please?”

Max swallows, and then nods. El smiles, really smiles, and reaches forward to grab Max’s hand, pulling her to her feet. Max stares at her again and El nervously takes her hand back. Max takes a deep breath and then, before El can process it, takes hold of El’s hand again. El grins, and slowly, slowly, Max grins too. It feels like a good start.

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It gets better from there. They draw. Max doodles a redhead on a skateboard and writes *zoomer* beside it like a challenge. El draws flowers and blue butterflies. They giggle together when Lucas and Dustin fight, still hesitant and wary but relieved, too. They link arms when walking on the sidewalk in town, because the feeling of someone watching becomes infinitely more frightening after having faced what lies in the shadows. Max teaches El to braid hair and they sit for hours watching TV while El practices until her fingers no longer fumble.

They sit with Joyce around her little kitchen, fingers curling around their mugs, and take slow sips from their hot chocolate while Joyce chatters with something like pride shining in her eyes. Max piles marshmallows onto her drink and sticks on onto her tongue to make El giggle.

Nancy takes them shopping, borrowing her mom’s car. They drive with the all windows the way down and Nancy lets them stick their arms all the way out, so they can feel the wind rushing between their fingers. She turns the music all the way up and Max screams with laughter. El’s curls fly around her hair and she beams.

They sit in a field filled with flowers and autumn leaves, and Max sticks a flower crown on Mike’s head. Hawkins always has autumn leaves, El’s noticed. Mike grins and adjusts the crown, leaning over to give El a kiss on the cheek when he notices her gaze. Max chortles and reaches out to push him over, cackling when he sprawls helplessly on the floor, laughing in a way that sounds more carefree than El can remember him ever being.

She starts school with Mike and Max by her side, and Lucas and

Dustin and Will at theirs, and she feels unstoppable. They show her every one of her classes, and where they eat lunch, and the elusive Mr Clarke, and El takes it all in with Max beside her. On days like these, the cabin feels so far away that El can barely remember the crushing loneliness that swallowed her up for so long.

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“Don’t let me fall.”

Max grins. “Have I ever?” El levels her with a solemn look and Max’s smile softens.

“Course I won’t, El.”

El takes a deep breath. Her fingers are fisted onto the sleeves of Max’s jacket, clenching onto her forearms.

“You can do it, Gel!” Dustin’s voice is too loud, it always is. El furrows her brow.

“Don’t call me that!”

Dustin cackles, and El can hear Lucas smacking his arm. “Pick one name, doofus,” he snaps. “Jane, or El. *One*.”

“No,” Dustin retorts, “Gel is perfect. The ultimate name. C’mon, Lucas, it’s way more powerful that way—” Max rolls her eyes and El decides to tune out the boys.

“Promise you won’t let me fall?” Max squeezes El’s arms and nods.

“Promise.” El studies her face and then nods decisively.

“Okay.” She takes a steadying breath, squeezes her eyes shut, and steps up so that both her feet are now standing on Max’s skateboard. El yelps when the board beneath her feet jerks forward, but Max just laughs, still smiling, so El tries to relax her hold on Max.

“You’re gonna love it, El.” Max’s voice is confident, reassuring, and El trusts her unreservedly.

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Some of the girls at school don't like El. That's okay. She'd known it would happen, Mike had worried and Joyce had warned and Hopper had wondered. Some of the boys don't like El either, but that matters less, somehow. At least to her it does.

Max says it doesn't matter, anyway, and Nancy says that by the time they reach high school things will have changed. And it isn't lonely. El had thought it might be, had worried, but she has Max and the others, and she doesn't need anyone else because she has them and she loves them.

When she tells this to Max, the other girl's face goes kind of funny. El isn't sure what she's thinking, and then Max reaches out to grab El and pull her into a rough hug. It's a bit awkward, as they'd been mid-walk, heading towards to the cabin. El freezes, and her hands float around Max's back in confusion, before hugging Max back right as she pulls away again.

"Friends," Max says, breathless and eyes shining.

"Friends," El agrees. "Best friends." Max's eyes shine brighter, her smile glowing, and El links their elbows together. "I'm very glad."

"Me too." Max's voice is quiet, but not sad, not anymore.

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Hopper gets her a skateboard. She screams when she sees it and doesn't stop smiling all day, and Hopper's eye roll is overwhelmingly fond when he lets her run off to show Max. Max cheers, whooping and hollering, and grabs El's hand as they run get Mike's board.

Max lords it over Mike for weeks, teasing him about his zoomer girlfriend, and Mike tells her to shut up but it lacks any bite, and Max just cackles. El still prefers riding on the back of Mike's bike, but Max says that's only because she gets to cuddle Mike. El just winks.

They race down the streets, El's arms nestled around Mike's waist, Dustin and Will and Lucas whizzing past them and Max ahead of them all, her red hair like a burst of fire chasing down the hills. The sun is warm and glowing, and the wind is soft and wild, and El has so much love in her chest she feels like she might burst.

(Mike is her safe place, all kind and warm and *love*, and El loves him so, so much. Will is like rain, steady and kind, and they sit at Joyce's table for hours, drawing while Joyce hums off-tune. Dustin and Lucas are like balance, like gravity, teasing and bickering and full of such a strong affection that El feels smothered by them in the best possible way. And Max is sunshine, and the coolest person in the party, and El loves her. She loves them all, and they all love her, and El could wish for nothing more in the world.)

### **Author's Note:**

THIS IS SO MESSY AND BAD IM,, SORRY,,,,

pls review friends i need some validation before  
school starts up tomorrow lol :)